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Authority NWD 979520
By JWF NARA Date 9/12/97

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Prime Minister Chou En-lai

Yeh Chien-ying, Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee

Vice Prime Minister Chiao Kuan-hua

Tang Wang-shen, Interpreter

Shen Jo-yen, Interpreter

Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State

Winston Lord, Director of Planning and Coordination, State Department

DATE AND TIME:

Saturday, November 10, 1973
9:25 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

PLACE:

Great Hall of the People, Peking
Peoples Republic of China

(As the group was walking toward the meeting room, Marshall Yeh indicated to the Secretary that he now had heavier burdens as Secretary of State. The Secretary replied that it was more complicated, but the direction of policy was the same. There had been major personnel changes.)

The Secretary: I thought, Mr. Prime Minister, we might have a brief talk on a particular problem that came up during the visit of General Secretary Brezhnev to the United States. It rose in the following manner, and I'll give you the circumstances because they may be of some interest to you.

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Authority NWD 99570

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2

During that week, during the visit, Mr. Brezhnev attempted to see the President alone without me (laughter). He went through extremely complicated maneuvers to accomplish this (laughter). For example, in California, he stayed in the house of the President and he pretended to go to bed, and then he thought I would leave. When he thought I had left, he got up and asked to see the President, who himself had gone to bed (laughter). I mention it only because it was not an accidental conversation. After all the maneuvers the President insisted that I be presented. So it was myself, the President, Mr. Brezhnev and an interpreter.

And he (Brezhnev) said he wanted to have a conversation which only he and the President would know about and no one else. This led him into a long diagnosis of what he called the "China problem" which was extremely violent and reported many examples of how the Russians were treated in China. That is of no consequence. But there were two major points he was making in this conversation. First, that the Soviet Union would resist by force any military arrangement between the United States and China, and he asked whether there existed a military arrangement. We didn't feel he had a right to ask that question. I know there doesn't exist one, but we do not feel that he had the right to ask that question. So we said the Chinese have never raised any military arrangement with us, which is correct. He then demanded an assurance that there would never be any military arrangements in the future, and he repeated the thought again that he would use force if anything like this happened.

The second point he made was independent of the United States and China. It had to do only with China. He said that the growth of the Chinese nuclear capability was unacceptable to the Soviet Union, and he proposed an exchange of information about what we knew about their nuclear program. We told them that we don't engage in an exchange of intelligence information.

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Since then...let me do this in sequence. This happened late one afternoon; it lasted a very long time, but I'm just giving the essence. Late that night Gromyko asked to see me, and asked me what I thought of what Brezhnev had earlier said to the President, even though Brezhnev had given his word that no one would know except Brezhnev and the President what he said. He said that Brezhnev had said to the President only two things and that I would know about them. I said it was an unheard of proposition, and I'd never heard this kind of talk between countries who were not allies.

He then said he wanted it understood that they might consider Chinese political relationships, and not only military relations, a provocation.

Prime Minister
Chou:

Chinese military relations or relations with other countries?

The Secretary:

And I said like your friendship treaty with India? He then evaded the answer, and I told him that this was an inadmissible line of discussion and that we would not pursue it.

Since then, the Soviet Union has tried on three or four occasions to exchange information on China with us by putting it in the context of a discussion on strategic nuclear limitations. The way they do it is to say they should be entitled to have equality with the United States, and, in addition to this equality, enough weapons to destroy China. And those weapons must increase each year because of the Chinese situation.

I tell you this, Mr. Prime Minister, not out of altruism, but because I believe the destruction of China by the Soviet Union, or even a massive attack on China by the Soviet Union, would have unforeseeable consequences for the entire international situation. (The interpreter indicated that there was not total understanding of this point.) I don't tell this out of abstract altruism because I believe it is in our interest to prevent such an attack. You know as well as I do, Mr.

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Authority NWD 97570
By JWF NARA Date 7/12/87

4

Prime Minister, the consequences on Japan, Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East if such an attack even had the appearance of success.

Before these conversations, I believe the Soviets had a generalized hostility toward China, but I did not believe they had a specific plan. You may have had another idea. I do not now exclude the possibility of some specific ideas.

Now, as a result of these conversations, I ordered some studies in our government that only four or five people know about, of what we know about what such a threat could be, and what from our knowledge could be done to prevent it, and of what help we could be in ways that are not obvious, because I don't think a formal relationship is desirable for either of us. These would be of a technical nature. I don't have those papers with me here now, but I have them in my guest house. We have some ideas on how to lessen the vulnerability of your forces and how to increase the warning time, and I repeat that it has to be done in such a way that it is very secret and not obvious.

If the Prime Minister is interested, I can have Commander Howe, or in some respects I could, mention the details in a small group -- either to the Prime Minister or someone he designates. This is not something that involves reciprocity or any formal relationship, but advice based on our experience and some regularized intelligence information. (The interpreter questions the meaning of "regularized.") "Regularize intelligence information" means the regularized information from us to you, not the other way.

Apart from that, I thought it might be of some importance to you to know the state of mind of Brezhnev as stated to us. As far as we are concerned, we don't believe we can permit this, though it is a very difficult problem how to work out in practice.

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Authority NWD 979570

By JWF NARA Date 7/2/97

5

Prime Minister
Chou:

During your recent short visit, it was probably not raised again.

The Secretary:

No, he raised it again. He raised the question of exchanging military information again.

Prime Minister
Chou:

They have satellites that can survey China every day.

The Secretary:

I know.

Prime Minister
Chou:

And they still want it?

The Secretary:

Our belief is their photography is not as good as ours. But I think what they want is an indication from us that they would use as a symbol of cooperation rather than using it. They want us to accept the desirability of destroying China's nuclear capability or limiting it rather than the information itself. But the exchange of information is not a big problem, as that obviously we won't do, and they probably have what they need.

Prime Minister
Chou:

Even though the Middle East was so tense, they still discuss such an issue?

The Secretary:

When I was there it was during the ceasefire discussion.

Prime Minister
Chou:

It was before our alert. You went originally for the ceasefire.

The Secretary:

Yes.

Prime Minister
Chou:

They invited you?

The Secretary:

At that time there was no question of military pressure on us. The military pressure started four days later, and since then, they have not raised it.

Prime Minister
Chou:

It was only mentioned during the visit.

The Secretary:

During my visit and not since then.

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Authority NWD 979570

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6

Prime Minister Chou: I believe they would suggest such matters to Japan, too.

The Secretary: It is conceivable. In any event, even if they don't, if they started on this course, it is in my judgment not clear what Japan will do. We have not heard that they have proposed anything like this to Japan.

Prime Minister Chou: They always wanted to get Japan brought closer to them and away from us. They know they can't sever relations completely between you and Japan, but at least they want to get Japan closer to them than to you.

The Secretary: Yes.

Prime Minister Chou: We have also said to Japan that if they want to exploit Siberia, it is better to be done with you than alone. I believe Prime Minister Tanaka will tell you that when he meets you.

The Secretary: That is our view, too.

Prime Minister Chou: I told them that if they do, it is better to do it with the United States. We said we do not fear their exploiting Siberian resources. The only thing is that we are afraid that they might be taken in.

Have you found some difficulties within the Soviet leadership at present, among the three or four of them?

The Secretary: No, because we always deal with Brezhnev.

Prime Minister Chou: Yes, he monopolizes the scene.

The Secretary: At first we always dealt with Kosygin or Podgorny and Brezhnev. Gromyko is a functionary and not a leader.

Prime Minister Chou: Suslov doesn't take part in the negotiations.

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Authority NWD 97570
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7

The Secretary: Only once when the President was in Moscow. We have no special information on that. Our people think he's more ideological and less bureaucratic than the others. He's ideological and less bureaucratic than the others, but I don't know how we would know that.

Prime Minister Chou: He knows historical theory, but he follows the other line of thinking. He explains other peoples' theories. The Soviet party history has been changed three times, and all three times under his guidance.

The Secretary: That I didn't know. I knew it had changed three times; I didn't know he did it.

Prime Minister Chou: He is the one who finalized the draft, so he is that kind of author who follows the others.

The Secretary: There is no outstanding intellectual leader in the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister Chou: No. they don't have any. It is impossible to have any, because they are so oppressive.

Thank you anyway for your information and for your notification. Anyway, Ambassador Huang Chen has passed on what you have told him, and we have taken note of that. At present, though they are quite busy on day-to-day policies and other matters, they have to curse us everyday in the newspapers anyway. There are some people here in our party who read and study the materials, but we don't have the time to go through them all.

So should we begin with a plenary session tomorrow?

The Secretary: Yes.

Prime Minister Chou: Would you like a plenary session or begin with five or six people as I just said now?

The Secretary: What do you think?

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Authority NWD 979570
By JWF NARA Date 7/12/97

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE
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8

Prime Minister I think about four or five.
Chou:

The Secretary: All right. We'll make it four or five. I think that's better.

Prime Minister Because you have travelled through so many countries.
Chou:

The Secretary: If on the other matter, the Marshall or someone else wants the studies, they can get in touch with Mr. Lord, and Commander Howe can give those conclusions.

Prime Minister All right.
Chou:

You're leaving on the 14th, is that so?

The Secretary: Yes, in the morning.

Prime Minister The more you move eastward, the more time you lose.
Chou:

The Secretary: That is true, but at the end you finally gain it all back.

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